

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 66 | Number 2 (Spring 2007)

pps. 206-207

---

## Traveling between Worlds: German-American Encounters

Eleanor L. Turk  
*Indiana University East*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2007 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Turk, Eleanor L. "Traveling between Worlds: German-American Encounters." *The Annals of Iowa* 66 (2007), 206-207.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1122>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

The history of American women is peopled by such bold and radical individuals as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Iowa's Annie Savery, as well as countless individuals who shared their sentiments but could not act upon them. Brakebill's study sheds important light on the life of one, a midwestern woman who yearned to transcend the limits of her rural environment but lacked the necessary personal and external resources to surmount the powerful ideologies governing antebellum women's lives. Brakebill effectively documents the discrepancies between Colby's public writings about women's rights and the "dull round of duties" that claimed her time as a farm woman (176). Lacking a supportive network of family members and friends, she succumbed to negative thinking and never fully realized her potential as a writer or reformer. Colby's is not a unique story, but it is one that has remained relatively unexplored until now. Brakebill excels in placing Colby in the larger context of the northeastern Ohio farm economy, but due to large gaps in the journal entries, critical details about her early and later life remain elusive. For a book that is part of the *Civil War in the North* series, the discussion of the war years is disappointing. Ultimately, however, this richly researched work is to be savored for the glimpse it provides into one midwestern woman's struggles to define her identity.

*Traveling between Worlds: German-American Encounters*, edited by Thomas Adam and Ruth Gross. The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures 36. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. viii, 190 pp. Illustrations, table, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Eleanor L. Turk is professor of history emerita at Indiana University East. She has published books and articles on German and German American history.

*Traveling between Worlds* includes six essays from the Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lecture series in 2003. Christof Mauch (German Historical Institute) introduces the volume's central theme, the "inter-cultural transfer" between Germany and North America, and briefly profiles the contributors. The first three essays—by Eberhard Brüning (University of Leipzig), John T. Walker (Fullerton College), and Thomas Adam (University of Texas-Arlington)—present perspectives of American elites who traveled in Germany during the nineteenth century. They produced writings full of ideas gained and resultant suggestions for improving American society and institutions. Brüning offers an interesting and comprehensive list of these eminent Americans who visited the German provincial courts and universities. They were impressed by the education and culture of the aristocracy and

filled with enthusiasm to emulate their libraries, museums, and universities at home. Upon their return, they helped found Boston Public Library and New York's Metropolitan Museum and introduced reforms into prominent East Coast universities. Few of these Americans investigated conditions for the working classes and their discontent. To that extent their privileged view of Germany was unrealistic.

Gabriele Lingelbach (University of Trier) correctly questions how well these American elites really knew even the German institutions they so admired. Her thought-provoking essay demonstrates important differences among the libraries, museums, and universities of the two societies. She argues that the American institutions' organizational structures, means of support, and clientele arose more from local sources than from cultural transfer. Her study emphasizes the research mission of the universities, arguing that the United States in the nineteenth century produced none of the nonacademic research institutes that were important in Germany. She does not discuss the important engineering and agricultural missions of the American land grant universities, which had little counterpart in Germany.

Andrew Yox (Northeast Texas Community College) writes of German American poets, concluding that their emigration provoked sadness, anger, guilt, and nostalgic nationalism. Their writing lacks the romantic intellectualism of the German genre as well as the assertive confidence of the American. Their poems, however representative of the immigrants, made little impact on the American literary scene. Yox is unclear about whether their lack of impact was because the poetry was in the German language or because it was published mainly in ethnic publications. Assimilation or lack of audience may have contributed to their obscurity.

In the final essay, Christiane Harzig (Arizona State University) ranges widely across theory and historiography to settle into an excellent analysis of the influence of German women immigrants, their vital economic role in agriculture, their flexibility in finding urban employment, and their model dedication to family.

Excellent chapter notes make these sophisticated essays especially beneficial to scholars.